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AUTHOR	Mihesuah, Devon A.
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ABSTRACT

This book traces the history of the Cherokee Female Seminary, established by the Cherokee Nation in 1851 near Tahlequah (Oklahoma). Unusual among Indian schools because it was founded by neither the federal government nor missionaries, the school offered a rigorous curriculum from elementary grades through high school, patterned after that of Mount Holyoke Female Seminary (Massachusetts). It offered no instruction in Cherokee language or culture, but was open only to full- and mixed-blood Cherokee girls. Many students were acculturated Cherokees who welcomed the opportunity to study in an environment where "White ways" were held up as the ideal. More traditional Cherokees found the atmosphere oppressive. The school was in operation during 1851-56 and 1872-1909; approximately 3,000 girls attended, but only 212 graduated. However, these women and their educational experiences greatly influenced the Cherokee Nation and the lives of their descendants. Chapters cover: (1) Cherokee educational history prior to forced relocation to Oklahoma in 1838-39; (2) establishment of the male and female seminaries; (3) the early years (institutional mission and focus on acculturation as "improvement"); (4) teachers, curriculum, and administration, 1876-1909 (including the pivotal leadership role of Anne Wilson, principal 1875-1900); (5) life at the seminary (student experiences, extracurricular activities, celebrations, contact with boys, negative impacts on traditional full-bloods); (6) student health and health care; and (7) graduates and former students. An epilogue poses questions for further research. Appendices provide information on former students. Includes notes, an extensive bibliography, an index, and photographs. (SV)

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